



Forest Service News Release

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Draft Decision Released for Gold Butterfly Project

Hamilton, MT, December 17 — The Bitterroot National Forest has released the Draft Record of Decision (ROD) and Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) for the Gold Butterfly Project, a proposed vegetation management and fuels reduction project in the Sapphire Mountains east of Corvallis. The project is located on the Stevensville and Darby Ranger Districts between St. Clair Creek to the south and Burnt Fork Creek to the north.

Forest Supervisor Matt Anderson selected Alternative 2. The selected alternative allows project-specific Forest Plan amendments that align the management of old growth stands to the best available scientific information. This resulted in a Final Supplemental EIS that updates and redefines terms of the 2019 Gold Butterfly Final Environmental Impact Statement (2019).

The Gold Butterfly Project is designed to:

- Improve forest resilience to natural disturbances like fire, insects, and diseases
- Reduce chronic sediment sources in the Willow Creek watershed
- Improve water quality and bull trout habitat
- Restore or improve key habitat including meadows, aspen, and whitebark pine
- Manage timber to provide forest products, jobs, and income to local communities
- Retain old growth status in all treatment units

About 90 percent of proposed treatment acres are within an area designated for insect and disease treatment because of dense pockets of dead and dying trees. The area is impacted by mountain pine beetle, Douglas-fir bark beetle, dwarf mistletoe, and western spruce budworm damage. The proposed treatments include commercial timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, and prescribed burning to improve forest health.

The Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan identified the area as a 'high priority' for fuels reduction in the Wildland Urban Interface.

More information about the Gold Butterfly Project, including the Draft ROD and FSEIS is available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=51486>.

The draft decision is subject to public objection under Code of Federal Regulations §218. Objections may only be filed by those who previously submitted comments on the project. All objections must be submitted to the Forest Service within 30 days of the legal notice publication in the Ravalli Republic newspaper.

Objections may be mailed to: USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, ATTN: Objection Reviewing Officer, Building 26 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, MT 59804. Electronic objections must be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@usda.gov. Faxed objections may be submitted to (406) 329-3411. Please specify “Gold Butterfly Project Objection” in the subject line.

If you are unable to submit electronic, fax, or postal objections and must submit them by hand to the Northern Regional Office, please refer to signage at the front door regarding the delivery of hand delivered items, which will include a phone number to arrange delivery of your objection. The office is not open currently for hand-delivered submissions.

All objections are open to public inspection and will be posted to the Forest Service website.

For additional information concerning the Gold Butterfly Project, contact Steve Brown, Stevensville District Ranger at (406) 777-5461 or steve.brown2@usda.gov.

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